IRENAEUS, THE "CANON OF TRUTH," AND THE *GOSPEL OF JOHN*: "MAKING A DIFFERENCE" THROUGH HERMENEUTICS AND RITUAL

BY

ELAINE PAGELS

As is well known, Irenaeus of Lyons set out to "make a difference"[1] between Christians in order to demonstrate that those he calls "followers of Ptolemy" (and so, he implies, of Valentinus), while commonly accepted as fellow believers, were, in fact, apostates and heretics. This article suggests that what concerned Irenaeus was not so much that they held *beliefs and ideas* that differed from his own, but that they engaged in *practices* intended to effect *apolutrôsis* ("redemption," sometimes called "second baptism"). Second, this article shows how Irenaeus, determined to develop a practical antidote to this heretical "poison," used language he found in the *Gospel of John* to radically revise what he called "the canon of truth received

[1] In borrowing this phrase from Daniel Boyarin, I am glad to acknowledge my indebtedness to him, both in conversation, and to the insights expressed in his forthcoming work, in which he uses this phrase to refer to questions of difference involving Jews and Christians. In the preparation of this research, I am grateful also to other colleagues and friends who have read it in earlier stages, and have offered comments and criticism, especially to Anthony Grafton, Peter Brown, Susannah Elm, and the other members of the Davis Seminar at Princeton University, where the paper was first presented. I owe special thanks, as well, to Virginia Burrus, Karen King, Rebecca Lyman, Peter Schäfer, Michael Stone, and Annette Reed. I am especially grateful to Professor Alain Le Boulluec for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper which enabled me to make corrections and qualifications. In regard to the topic of "making" heretics, among recent work note also D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (New York/Oxford, 1995), and the incisive monograph by V. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley, 1995). Notable recent work on Irenaeus' Scriptural exegesis includes, for example, P. Ferlay, "Irénée de Lyon exégète du quatrième évangile," NRT 106 (1984), 222-34; J. Fantino, *La théologie de Saint Irénée: lecture trinitaire des Écritures en réponse à l'exégèse gnostique* (Paris, 1994), and D.J. Bingham, *Irenaeus' Use of Matthew's Gospel in Adversus Haereses* (Louvain, 1998).

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in baptism"[2] to establish the efficacy of "ecclesiastical" practices of baptism and eucharist.

In his influential recent monograph, Alain Le Boulluec has articulated well the traditional view, suggesting that Justin, in effect, "invented" heresy,[3] by charging that many who "confessed themselves to be Christians" were not among the "disciples of the true and pure doctrine of Jesus Christ," but instead were inspired by evil demons "to speak blasphemies."[4] Le Boulluec carefully analyzes the way that Justin changes the connotation of the terms *hairesis* and *diadoche* from their more general philosophic usage in order to characterize those he regards as false Christians as "liars and apostates" inspired by—and descended from—Satan.[5] Le Boulluec then proceeds to show in detail how Justin's heirs, prominently including Irenaeus, inherit Justin's repertoire of polemics, both using them and transforming them in order to deal with controversies that would emerge in later generations. He intends to examine, in his words,

> . . . si les mêmes schèmes continuent de dominer des désaccords différents, ou si le changement des préoccupations et des débats entraîne des infléchissements dans la description et la classification des "hérésies".[6]

When introducing his topic, Le Boulluec expresses concern about certain limitations imposed on our understanding by the heresiological sources, as well as by his own methodology. Although "la réalité désignée comme hérésie possède à l'origine une extension plus large qu'un courant doctrinal divergent,"[7] he points out that Justin and his successors chose to define heresy by contrast with "orthodoxy" and thus underplay issues of orthopraxy. Consequently, Le Boulluec observes, from the second century to the present, discussions of heresiological controversies, including his own, tend to lack sociological perspective.[8]

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[2] Adv. haer. I.9.4.

[3] A. Le Boulluec, *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque II^e-III^e siècles* (Paris, 1985) I, 110. Note, too, R. Lyman's contribution to the Davis Seminar at Princeton University on Nov. 10, 2000: "The Politics of Passing: Justin Martyr's Conversion as a Problem of 'Hellenization.'"

[4] Dial. 35.1-3.

[5] On *haireseis*, see Le Boulluec I, 36.41-51; on *diadoche*, I, 84-91. For discussion of the latter term, see A. Brent, "Diogenes Laertius and the Apostolic Succession," JEH 44.3 (July, 1993), 347-375; for an alternate view, see E. Bammel, "Sukzessionsprinzip im Urchristentem," *St. Eph. Aug.* xxxi (1990), 63-72.

[6] Ibid., I, 16.

[7] Ibid., I, 12.

[8] Ibid., I, 12-17.

How, then, can we discover, along with *La notion de l'hérésie*, some clues to its practice? I suggest that we take a somewhat different approach and attend more to the polemical techniques Irenaeus *innovates* than to those he *inherits*. Then, when we proceed to evaluate his testimony in terms of the available evidence from Nag Hammadi sources, prominently including the six major Valentinian texts discovered there,[9] we begin to see the outlines of such a sociological perspective emerge. As we shall see, this approach demonstrates, in the first place, that the situation Justin confronts in Rome and Asia Minor (c. 150 CE) differs enormously from that addressed by Ireaneus in Lyons some thirty years later. Second, as mentioned above, it shows that, especially in regard to Irenaeus, we need to consider what constitutes "heresy" not so much, as we have traditionally, in terms of people holding different *beliefs and ideas*, but in terms of people involved in different forms of *practice, both hermeneutical and ritual*.

If, then, Justin "invented heresy," who are those whom he seeks to identify as heretics? Le Boulluec most often characterizes Justin's opponents as "the gnostics."[10] In fact, throughout his discussion of Justin's hermeneutics, Le Boulluec repeats the term and its variants (i.e. "gnostic Christians;" Justin's "anti-gnostic polemic") so often that the repetition distracts attention from his argument (so much so that reading his discussion, I actually began to count the occurrences of the term, and discovered the trivial—but telling—fact that he uses it an average of three times on every page).[11] For example, Le Boulluec explains that in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin articulates hermeneutical arguments that he has developed in order to "refute the objections of the gnostics,"[12] whom he identifies as "gnostic Christians."[13] According to Le Boulluec, these include Marcion as well as "the gnostics whose names are most frequently cited by the fathers,"[14] including, he specifies, Basilides and Valentinus. Even at the point of

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[9] Specifically, the *Gospel of Truth* (I, 3); *Treatise on Resurrection* (I, 4); *Tripartite Tractate* (I, 5), *Gospel of Philip* (II, 3); *Interpretation of the Gnosis* (XI, 1); and *A Valentinian Exposition* (I, 2).

[10] Typical of this usage is the following statement (I, 61): "Le souci primordial du parti ecclésiastique représenté par Justin est d'exclure les gnostiques de la communauté chrétienne." On p. 84, he effectively equates the "hérésies" Justin opposes with "le gnosticisme."

[11] See especially his discussion of "Polémique antihérétique et doctrine de l'Écriture chez Justin," I, 193-208.

[12] Ibid., see especially I, 198ff.

[13] Ibid., I, 201.

[14] More precisely, as Le Boulluec has pointed out, Justin speaks of "Basilideans" and "Valentinians".

acknowledging that some aspects of Justin's argumentation remain obscure, Le Boulluec declares that *"le point le plus sûr est l'effort de Justin pour protéger la Bible de l'assaut des gnostiques."*[15]

Le Boulluec proceeds to infer not only that Justin contends against the hermeneutics of Valentinus and his followers, but also to say that the latter were well aware of Justin's critique, and responded in kind. On the basis of comparative analysis of Justin's discussion of the law with that of Valentinus' disciple Ptolemy in his *Letter to Flora*, Gilles Quispel cautiously states that Ptolemy might possibly be responding to Justin,[16] while Le Boulluec declares that "Il n'est *sans doute pas une réaction directe* à l'effort à la fois polémique et conservateur du Justin."[17] Furthermore, throughout his discussion, Le Boulluec assumes that "gnostic" is equivalent to "Valentinian"—although, as we shall see, this equation is wholly unknown to Justin.[18]

For if contending against gnostics were, indeed, Justin's primary purpose, he never says so. For all of Le Boulluec's repetition of the word, Justin did not know the term "gnostic,"[19] so far as we can tell—much less the way that Irenaeus would apply it, a generation after his death, to Christians who follow Valentinus. What *is* accurate in Le Boulluec's account is, quite simply, what he quotes from the *Dialogue with Trypho*—that Justin singles out certain people "who are called Christians" but who, unlike Justin himself, do not hold to the "pure and true teachings" of Christ. Justin declares that such people are "godless, impious heretics who teach doctrines that are entirely blasphemous, atheistic, and foolish."[20] The one

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[15] Loc. cit.

[16] *Ptolemée, Lettre à Flora*, Sources chrétiennes 24 (Paris, 1966), 27.

[17] Ibid., I, 203.

[18] Certainly it is possible that when Ptolemy wrote his *Letter to Flora*, he was responding to Justin's theology, although I agree with Quispel in finding only generalized similarities between the latter and the *Dialogue with Trypho*. I find, in fact, more similarities than differences between Justin's approach and that of Ptolemy; see, for example, the excellent article by W.A. Löhr, "La doctrine de Dieu dans la Lettre à Flora de Ptolémée," RHPR (75, 1995/2), 177-191, and the incisive new recent article by C. Markschies, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," in ZAC 4 (2002), 225-254. Even if Le Boulluec were right to assume, first, that Ptolemy knew Justin's work, and, second, that he regarded it as antithetical to his own, however, it does not follow that Justin knew—and aimed his work against—that of such teachers as Ptolemy.

[19] Having searched his writings for the term, I could not find it, and appreciate Annette Reed's subsequent search of TLG, which confirmed that the term does not appear in any of Justin's extant writings.

[20] Dial. 80.3.

man whom Justin singles out as archheretic, of course, is Marcion of Pontus, who, to Justin's dismay, has succeeded in gaining wide acceptance as an influential Christian teacher and head of those groups of believers who accept his teaching along with the ascetic and ecclesiastical disciplines he imposes.[21]

In short, Justin attacks not "gnostics" but *heretics*—and above all Marcion, that zealous, passionate disciple of Paul who set up rival Christian congregations that, Justin warned, many believers mistook for genuine Christian churches. Marcion himself was by no means a gnostic, whatever we take that slippery term to mean;[22] on the contrary, he tended to read the Hebrew Bible (along with elements he selected from the *Gospel of Luke* and the letters of Paul) quite literally. As Le Boulluec observes, what Justin accomplished was to have "invented heresy" by lumping together a wide range of "so-called Christians" as people who do neither teach nor practice the "pure and sound doctrine of Christ," and to claim that they are all related to one another, however different they may be, since all derive their common inspiration from "the serpent, the great author of apostasy."[23] Yet the assumption that identifies *heretics* with *gnostics*—and *gnostics* with "followers of Valentinus"—an assumption so pervasive that even Alain Le Boulluec,

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[21] On the terms *scholè* and *ekklesia*, see the fascinating study by P. Lampe, *Die Stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, 1989). I am indebted to V. Burrus for pointing out certain assumptions I had adopted in previous work in her incisive article, "Hierarchalization and Genderization of Leadership in the Writings of Irenaeus", *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989) 42-48. Yet would switching categories (from *episkopos* to *didaskalos*, for example, as A. Brent's article on "Diogenes Laertius and the Apostolic Succession" seems to imply) adequately advance our understanding? On this question, I suggest that we need to evaluate more carefully the connotations of both terms; certainly R. Lyman, A. Brent, and V. Burrus are right to show that the evidence needs fresh evaluation.

[22] Even Hans Jonas, who used the term in a generic and inclusive way in his book *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist*, published in 1934, expressed awareness of the difficulty of applying this category to Marcion (see ch. 6); now that we have much more evidence of the works of those whom the heresiologists called "gnostics," contemporary scholars, even those who still use the term in regard to Valentinian and Sethian Christians, do not use this term in regard to Marcion. For a thoughtful discussion, see M. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, 1994); see also references to the contributions of Löhr, Lüdemann, and Markschies in note 29.

[23] Cf. Irenaeus, Adv. haer. I.27.4. Is the latter Justin's comment, or Irenaeus' editorial insertion? While I do not see evidence that allows us definitively to resolve this question, I suspect that this comment, which accords with Irenaeus' argumentation throughout, comes from his hand.

despite his careful and incisive verbal analysis, takes it for granted—is a tribute to Irenaeus' success. For, as we shall see, Irenaeus worked hard to forge these very links.

Besides not mentioning the term "gnostic," Justin never mentions the name *Valentinus*. Although, as noted above, Justin traces Marcion's inspiration to Simon of Gitto, who, he says, practiced magic, impersonated God, and consorted with a prostitute, and to the magician Menander, he does not mention Valentinus in this diabolic succession—or anywhere else. Can we assume, then, that Justin regarded Valentinus as a heretic? Christopher Markschies, addressing this question in his definitive monograph *Valentinus Gnosticus?: Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins* concludes from his careful investigation that in his own time Valentinus was neither characterized as "gnostic" nor "heretic."[24] And although Tertullian, following Irenaeus, writes his vehement treatise *Adversus Valentinianos* some forty years after Justin's death, he nevertheless attests that in his own time, Valentinus was widely respected as an "ingenious and eloquent" teacher.[25] Within a generation, of course, Irenaeus would indict the followers of Valentinus—with enormous success; but that is another story.

We should note, however, that the term "Valentinian" does occur once in Justin's extant writings, in that well known passage already cited from the *Dialogue with Trypho* 35.6, where he lists certain people who "confess themselves to be Christians," but who are, he says, false Christians more properly called by the names of their philosophic mentors. If it was Justin himself who included the term on this list, then he *did* indict Valentinus' followers, although contrary to his practice in the case of the others listed in this passage ("Marcionites," "Basilidians" and "Saturnalians") he makes

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[24] (Tübingen: 1992), passim; see especially his conclusion, "Valentin als frühchristlicher Lehrer," 388-407. Some twenty years earlier, Gerd Lüdemann concluded his survey of the evidence by showing that, in all probability, Valentinus continued to be regarded as a member of the Christian community by others in Rome; Lüdemann, Zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums in Rom, I, ZNW 70 (1979), 86-114, see especially 86-96. For other references, see note 29. I am grateful to Professor Le Boulluec for pointing out that Justin also does not mention Basilides by name.

[25] Tertullian, *Adv. Val.4*. This may, of course, evince the convention of representing "heretics" as formerly "genuine Christians," who subsequently strayed from the true path; see, for example, W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971), 111-194, and the perceptive discussion by D. Boyarin in *Dying For God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (California, 1995), 25f.

no mention, here or elsewhere, of their teaching. Alternatively, the term may have been added by a copyist in a later generation, for whom "Valentinians" would have become staple figures among the "usual suspects."[26] Other telling evidence comes from Adv Haer I.23-27—although this, too, is an argument from silence—precisely what we would expect, of course, if Justin did not regard Valentinus as an heretic. If we follow the critical consensus[27] that Irenaeus has borrowed the material he presents in this section from Justin's lost *Syntagma*, even here, where we find his most elaborate version of his theory of demonic succession, in which he names nearly a dozen "heretical" leaders, Justin neither mentions Valentinus nor discusses any teachings ascribed to him. Instead, he traces Marcion's diabolical heritage from "Simon the Samaritan" and Menander to such predecessors as Saturninus, Basilides, Carpocrates, Marcellina, Cerinthus, and Cerdo—a lineage that leads finally to the archheretic who, he says, put forth "the most daring blasphemy" of all. Since Irenaeus apparently has inserted this entire section from Justin's *Syntagma* into his own *Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Gnosis*—and is aiming his entire polemic primarily against Valentinian "the disciples of Ptolemy," we would expect that he would have taken special care to include—indeed, to amplify—anything that Justin might have said against Valentinus or against his followers. Yet apparently he finds nothing of the kind.[28]

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[26] If Justin did mention "Valentinians" as heretics, did he know what they taught? His extant theological writings offer no evidence to show that he did. Such works as *On the Resurrection*, for example, do not mention, much less describe, any such teachings; however, as Professor Le Boulluec reminds me, we cannot be certain that Justin actually wrote this work. He also points out P. Nautin's suggestion that the Carpocratians are also omitted from this list (Annuaire de l'EPH/SR 1981-82, 334ff.). By contrast, when Irenaeus and Tertullian discuss resurrection, both treat the topic as a starting point for anti-Valentinian polemic.

[27] A. Hildenfeld, *Die Ketzergeschichte des Urchristentums* (Leipzig 1884 = Hildesheim 1963); so also G. Henrici, s *Die valentinianische Gnosis und die heilige Schrift* (Berlin, 1871), as do Lüdemann and Markschies; see also Le Boulluec, I.163, note 109.

[28] I infer that what persuaded Le Boulluec that Justin directs his attack against "Valentinians"—and received their responses in kind—are the possible parallels between Justin's view of Israel's law and views expressed in Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*. Yet Justin may well have directed the distinctions he draws between "human traditions" and divine law from the same source as Ptolemy—namely, a source both revere, that is, from "sayings" of Jesus (see, for example, I Apol.15-19, and H. Köster's analysis of Justin's sources, in: *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia, 1990), 360-402. Compare, for example, Ptolemy, *Letter To Flora* 3.8. Besides their common regard for such sayings, Justin and Ptolemy share a Christian middle-Platonic perspective (as

What situation, then, does Irenaeus confront a generation after Justin's death—and see dividing Christian groups throughout the world, from Rome to Asia Minor, including his fellow Christians in his adopted homeland in Gaul? His argumentation in *Adversus Haereses* suggests that Irenaeus concerns himself little with Marcion or his followers. For Irenaeus, apparently, Marcion makes a relatively easy target, like "Simon the magician"—names he can invoke to conjure notorious frauds and sinners. What concerns Irenaeus instead is a far less obvious—and thus a much more insidious—threat to Christian unity: the presence of those he characterizes as followers of Valentinus, who offer believers "advanced" exegetical instruction that, he charges, culminates in various forms of initiation they call *apolutrosis*.

Knowing that he confronts the extremely difficult task of accusing many who have so far gone undetected—even unsuspected—within Christian congregations, Irenaeus borrows whatever he can from his predecessors, as Le Boulluec has shown so persuasively. First he opens his entire treatise by quoting a passage from "the apostle" (actually, of course, from deutero-Paul) whose indictment of "falsely so-called *gnosis*" will help Irenaeus make the equation between the teaching of Valentinus and "the heresy called *gnostic* (ἀπὸ τὴς λεγομένης γνωστικῆς αἱρέσεως)."[29] Denouncing "evil exegetes," Irenaeus first mentions "disciples of Valentinus," some of whose *Commentaries* he has read, along with "followers of Ptolemy" who, he charges, are "now spreading heresy." Then, as he concludes chapter thirteen, he places as an *addendum* to his diatribe against "Marcus the Magus" the polemical poem written by a revered "holy elder." Finally, as noted above, when he moves toward *concluding* Book I, Irenaeus does, indeed, adopt Justin's anti-heretical arsenal to make the audacious—and erroneous—charge that those he characterizes as "disciples of Valentinus" are actually crypto-Marcionites. Did he know—could he not have known—that Ptolemy, whose disciples form his chief target, had published a well-known anti-Marcionite tractate? In any case, Irenaeus elsewhere acknowledges that unlike Marcion's followers, Ptolemy's disciples are, indeed, sincere monotheists who "confess one

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W.A. Löhr has so clearly demonstrated in his article, "La Doctrine de Dieu dans la Lettre à Flora de Ptolémée," in RHPR (75, 1995/2) 177-191. Even more important, both Justin and Ptolemy, in their respective writings, actively opposed the teaching of Marcion. Thus several passages that Le Boulluec reads as anti-Valentinian can be much more simply understood as anti-Marcionite.

[29] Adv. haer. I.11.1; cf. I Timothy 1:4. Of course, this identification may not be original with Irenaeus; so far as I know, however, he is the first to make this equation.

God," as other Christians do.[30] But in his polemic, Irenaeus also includes the stock accusations of sexual licentiousness, while acknowledging that many of them are celibate (or, he adds darkly, they "pretend to be").[31] All of this means that these apparently innocent—even exemplary—Christians are actually Satan's agents—just as Justin and "the saintly elder" had said about Marcion of Pontus and the rest of his diabolical crew.

Yet *before* he takes up Justin's arsenal to amplify his own, from the twenty-third to the twenty-seventh chapters of book one, Irenaeus has already set forth, in *the previous twenty-two chapters*, the careful and detailed case that he directs much more specifically—and effectively—against "disciples of Ptolemy." Irenaeus' case against them makes clear that what constitutes heresy, for him, involves more than "heterodoxy" (in the simplest sense of accepting "other beliefs or opinions"). For as he sought to endorse and embrace the wide range of traditions he included as "apostolic"—traditions that already spanned a century and a half, and, he claimed, were shared by Christians ranging from Germany to Spain, Gaul to Asia, and from Italy to Lybia, Egypt and Palestine—Irenaeus was aware that the traditions he accepted, to say nothing of the many he sought to exclude, included considerable diversity of beliefs and opinions about God, about Jesus and his teaching, as well as diversity of practice.

Nor did Irenaeus deplore such diversity; on the contrary, he seems to regard it as evidence of the "catholicity" he claimed for "the church. . . . scattered throughout the whole world."[32] We need only recall, for example, how he argued against Christians who accepted only one gospel account,[33] and, how, unlike Justin's other student, Tatian, he made no attempt to harmonize various accounts into one. On the contrary, so far as we know, he became the first to urge believers to accept four distinct writings, despite their obvious differences, and join them into the collage that he called the "four-formed gospel".[34] Nor did Irenaeus simply deplore diversity of practice,

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[30] See Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*; concerning Irenaeus' awareness of their theology, see, for example, such passages as Adv. haer. I, Praef.; 1.15; II.42; III.16-17; IV.18,51; V.8; Lüdemann, 106-109; see also Löhr, "La doctrine de Dieu," and C. Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus?* especially 371-395; "Valentinian Gnosticism: Toward the Anatomy of a School," in: J. D. Turner and A. McGuire, *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years* (Brill, 1997), 401-438; and his recent article, "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus."

[31] Adv. haer. I.6.3.

[32] Adv. haer. I.10.2.

[33] Ibid., III.11.7.

[34] Adv. haer. III.11.8.

if we accept Eusebius' account of his attempt to persuade Victor, bishop of Rome, to deal amicably with those Asians whose Quartodecimian celebration of Easter differed from that of other groups in the capital city.[35]

Given, then, that Irenaeus acknowledged a wide range of views and practices, at what point did he find "heterodoxy" *problematic*, and for what reasons? Reflecting on this question, we need to remember that Irenaeus was not a philosophically inclined theoretician debating theology with academic and ecclesiastical colleagues so much as a young man thrust into leadership over the survivors of a group of Christians in Gaul after a violent and bloody persecution.[36] Irenaeus could not forget that in Smyrna, where he had grown up in the household of his beloved teacher, bishop Polycarp, his aged and renowned spiritual father had been hounded by police, and, after escaping and hiding in a country house, had been captured and brought back to the public amphitheater, where, as the mob shouted insults, he was burned alive. About twenty years later (c. 177), in Gaul, where Polycarp may have sent him to work as a missionary, Irenaeus had seen violence break out against Christians, some of whom were lynched, while dozens of others were arrested and tortured, many strangled to death in prison. According to the *Acts of the Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*, some thirty to fifty who survived and maintained their witness were torn apart by wild animals and killed by gladiators in a public spectacle attended by his fellow townspeople. And since the aged bishop Pothinus[37] had died of torture and exposure in prison, Irenaeus, in his early twenties, having somehow escaped arrest, apparently stepped in to serve as leader of those who were left.

For Irenaeus, then, denouncing "heresy" involved more than intolerance for diverse beliefs and ideas. For as he determined to strengthen these threatened believers and join them into a worldwide network—what Polycarp

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[35] Hist. Eccles. V.24.

[36] Historians debate whether Irenaeus' leadership included episcopal office, as scholars such as Ehrhardt (*The Apostolic Succession of the First Two Centuries of the Church*, London, 1953), have assumed (Eusebius, in Hist. Eccles. V.4 designates him as *presbyter*) or whether it consisted primarily in teaching authority, as H. Von Campenhausen suggests: see *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power* (California, 1969 trans. from the German edition from Tübingen, 1953), 169-173; see also A. Brent, "Diogenes Laertius and the Apostolic Succession," JEH 44.3 (July, 1993), 358f; and the fascinating discussion by P. Lampe, *Die stadrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (Tübingen, 1987), and V. Burrus, "Hierarchalization and Genderization of Leadership in the Writings of Irenaeus," *Studia Patristica* 21 (1989), 42-48.

[37] So, at any rate, Eusebius designates him; cf. *Hist. Eccles.* V.1.29.

had envisioned as a "catholic" church—what concerned the young leader was whatever proved seriously divisive. What, then, threatened the cohesiveness of the fragile groups that he and other leaders were trying to stabilize and unify? I suggest that we cannot classify those "ideas and opinions" he denounces, as scholars have traditionally, simply in terms of their philosophical and theological content. Instead, what Irenaeus identified as "heresy" among Valentinian Christians was *hermeneutical teaching communicated in ritual*—and specifically any form of initiation ritual that could constitute distinct groups within Christian congregations.

Let us investigate, then, the grounds on which he objects to their hermeneutical practice, which, as he demonstrates, is inextricably involved with *apolutrôsis*—initiation ritual he says they often enact as a kind of second—and "spiritual"—baptism. Following that, we shall see that the antidote Irenaeus prescribes for this heretical "poison" simultaneously involves hermeneutics and ritual as well. As we outline the structure of his argument, we note that Irenaeus prefaces his account by warning that "some people have cast truth aside," and introduce lies to lure and destroy naïve believers, having become "evil exegetes of things that have been well spoken."[38] But their lies, far from being obvious, actually seem to many people to be true. Irenaeus goes on to explain that "the disciples of Ptolemy" teach a primordial mystery about the origin of divine being, describing its structure as the "primary ogdoad" originating from the primal Father and from silence, and issuing in such dyadic energies as *nous/alètheia, logos/zoè*, and *anthrôpos/ekklèsia*.[39] They go on from this to relate the heavenly origin of divine Wisdom, who fashioned the creator in the image of the true God, and, working through him, brought forth the universe, as described in Genesis 1-3.[40] Such narratives of human creation, in which Wisdom and the creator participate, the latter making and forming matter, account for the different kinds of human response to revelation.[41]

Having sketched "their invention,"[42] Irenaeus declares that although such Christians claim to support such teaching from the Scriptures, they do so only by coming up with exegesis that is arbitrary and false. As he documents his case against them, Irenaeus demonstrates detailed and specific

[38] Adv. haer. I. praef.
[39] Ibid., I.1.1.
[40] Ibid., I.2.1-5.5.
[41] Ibid., I.5.6-7.5.
[42] Ibid., I.9.1.

knowledge of the various ways in which they read many passages from the Hebrew Bible—especially from such sources as *Genesis*, the *Psalms*, and from the oracles of Isaiah. Furthermore, although these "heretics" did not invent the practice of invoking "apostolic" writings as authoritative proof texts to verify their teaching,[43] Irenaeus demonstrates that they enormously developed this practice. Such texts as the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Tripartite Tractate*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* and the passage Irenaeus cites from a Valentinian *Commentary* on the *Gospel of John* amply confirm his point. Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora* even places the authority of "the sayings of the Lord" above that of the Jewish Bible, for these, its author declares, alone offer "the only unerring way to comprehend reality."[44]

Then, after citing many examples of their exegesis of single passages from Paul's letters as well as from "sayings of the Lord," Irenaeus presents, as his primary evidence of such "evil" exegesis, an extended quotation from an anonymous *Commentary* on the *Gospel of John* (often attributed to Ptolemy himself, but without sufficient evidence, as Christopher Markschies shows).[45] Thus, Irenaeus says, according to this commentary, "John, the disciple of the Lord, wanting to set forth the origin of all things, how the Father brought forth the all," set forth in this prologue—although in a way hidden from the casual reader—the original structure of divine being, which he calls the "first tetrad," and then the "primary ogdoad," consisting of the dynamic interaction of the energies mentioned above (page 349). Thus John mentions the "beginning of all things (*archè tôn pantôn*)," the *monogenès uios*, who brought forth all things; the *logos*, in whom, John says, "was *zoè*", and the "*zoè* was the *phôs tôn anthrôpon*." Through the latter phrase, the author says, John also intends to allude to *ekklèsia*, whom he implicitly includes with *anthrôpos*; finally, he also mentions *alètheia*.

Thus, the Valentinian exegete concludes,

> . . . clearly, then, (John) mentions the first tetrad, saying *patèr, charis, monogenès*, and *alètheia*; and thus John speaks of the first ogdoad, and mother of all the aions, for he speaks of charis, and *monogenès*, and *alètheia*, and *logos*, and *zoè*, and *anthrôpos*, and *ekklèsia*.[46]

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[43] See H. Von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (translated by J.A. Baker, Philadelphia, 1968), 120, note 63.

[44] Ptol. *ep* 3.8, lines 4-6: τῶν ῥηθησομένων ἡμῖν τὰς ἀποδείξεις ἐκ τῶν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν λόγων παριστῶντες, δι' ὧν μόνον ἔστιν ἀπταίστως ἐπὶ τὴν κατάληψιν τῶν ὄντων ὁδηγεῖσθαι.

[45] See, most recently, Markschies' "New Research on Ptolemaeus Gnosticus," 249-250; as he notes, the Latin version of Irenaeus' text concludes with the words *et Ptolemaeus quidem ita*; these words do not occur, however, in the Greek version.

[46] Note that in IV.20.11 Irenaeus cites a variant reading of Jn 1:18 that reads *mono-*

Addressing his reader, Irenaeus declares that he has quoted this exegetical passage at length so that "you may see, beloved, the method by which those using it deceive themselves, while they abuse the Scriptures by attempting to substantiate their own invention (*plasma*) from them."[47] Irenaeus declares that if John had meant to set forth the primary ogdoad, he would have done so in order; thus, he says, "the fallacy of their exegesis is obvious."[48] Irenaeus goes on to state that the *true* interpretation of John's gospel is the following: that "the Jesus who suffered for us and 'dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14) is the *logos* of God." Once one sees that the *logos* and Jesus are identical, "the whole ogdoad which they have constructed falls to pieces."[49]

Yet Irenaeus undertakes this massive, five volume refutation precisely because he knows that many Christians might find his conclusions far from obvious. Worse yet, they might well see him and his Valentinian opponent as rival theologians squabbling over exegesis.[50] How, then, can one tell truth from falsehood? Irenaeus explains that the only way to be safe from error is to "hold *unmoving* in (one's) heart the *kanôn tès alètheias* which (one) received in baptism."[51] Irenaeus refers to what he apparently assumes his audience knows. He recalls for them "this faith" which "the church, even when scattered throughout the whole world . . . received from the apostles." This, he says, includes faith in

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genès theos, instead of *monogenès uios*. The same variant occurs in Clement's account of Theodotus' exegesis of the passage; see, for example, *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 6:2, while Clement apparently "corrects" to *uios* (loc. cit. 7.3). See Harvey's note, II.22.1. I am grateful to Professor J. den Boeft for pointing out that K. Aland, in his recent edition of Nestle-Aland's Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum, prefers the reading *monogenès theos* on the basis of the manuscript tradition; see, for example, his eighth edition of Aland-Nestle's *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Stuttgart, 1987) 1.

[47] Adv. haer. I.9.1.

[48] Ibid., I.9.2.

[49] Adv. haer. I.9.3.

[50] Note, for example, Tertullian's warning against debating hermeneutics with "heretics" lest onlookers not know whom to believe, *Praesc.18*.

[51] Adv. haer. I.9.4. As is well known, A. von Harnack took this to be a version of a baptismal creed (*History of Dogma* I, 354-372) while others, like C. Blume (*Glauben und Taufbekenntnis in den alten Kirche*, 238-270) identified it with what he calls "apostolic tradition," and includes the whole of the doctrines, precepts, rites, and customs transmitted in the churches and preserved by the bishops. Most persuasive, however, is the work of van den Eynde, who shows that, for Irenaeus, it involves hermeneutics as well as creedal formulations, but cannot be as inclusive as Blume suggests; for his discussion on Irenaeus, see D. van den Eynde, *Les normes de l'enseignement chrétien dans la littérature patristique des trois premiers siècles* (Paris, 1933) 288-291.

> . . . . one God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth and the seas . . . and in one Christ Jesus, the son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit . . . and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the fleshly ascension into heaven . . . . of our beloved Christ Jesus.

All genuine believers throughout the world, he says, hold to this faith unanimously.

But, he charges, those who follow Valentinus all say different things.[52] To demonstrate this, Irenaeus proceeds to enumerate first what Valentinus taught (I.11.1), then what Secundus taught (I.11.2), what "another famous teacher" (possibly Heracleon) taught (I.1.3-4), what "others" say (I.11.5), what "followers of Ptolemy" teach (I.8.5, Latin version; I.12.1-2), and what Colorbasus says (I.12.3). Finally Irenaeus describes in detail the teachings and ritual practices of Marcus (I.13.1-16.2). Thus, Irenaeus concludes, all of this shows how "everyone of them claims to reveal something new every day"[53] about the creation. Their purpose in all of this is to "draw people away from faith in one God."

The work of Paul Bradshaw and other contemporary scholars of liturgy persuades me that Irenaeus' claims about unanimity of baptismal faith and practice in second century communities are considerably overstated.[54] Irenaeus himself acknowledges that the Christians he accuses of divisiveness object to this charge, insisting that they, too, being baptized Christians, have received the same faith and "confessed the same things"[55] as other believers. Being "the first Christian theologians" as Harnack called them,[56] such Christians attempt to go beyond the surface meaning of the texts to perceive their deeper, spiritual meaning. In the process, they attempt to discriminate between the original, hidden nature of God and the manifestations of divine activity that biblical sources characterize through such anthropomorphic epithets as Father, Creator, Lord of the universe. Like kabbalistic Jews centuries later, who would discuss how the qualities of the *En Sof*, the infinite, ineffable divine source, become manifest in the pre-

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[52] Adv. haer. I.11.1ff.

[53] Adv. haer. I.18.1.

[54] P. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York/Oxford, 1992).

[55] Adv. haer. III.15.2.

[56] A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York, 1961, trans. from the third German edition of 1900) I, 223f.

sent world, Ptolemy and his disciples reflect theologically on the divine being, discussing, debating, formulating and reformulating their imaginative and speculative theology.[57] Like the kabbalists, Ptolemy's followers do not take any single formulation as decisive, but as poetic intimations of divine reality. And although, as we noted, Irenaeus elsewhere admits that they "sincerely profess faith in one God,"[58] he criticizes them for going on, nevertheless, to reflect on such questions as "what God was doing before the universe was created," and claiming that, in so doing, they are following Jesus' injunction to "seek, and you shall find."[59]

What such seekers are *not* doing, however, is what Irenaeus now demands: that they "hold *unmoving* in (their) heart(s) the canon of truth . . . received in baptism." On the contrary, those who go on to join circles of "spiritual Christians" have become convinced that the catechetical teaching and baptism which they have received in common is only the preliminary first step in the life of faith. Followers of Ptolemy explain to their "ecclesiastical" brethren that those who are baptized nevertheless remain subject to cosmic powers. Thus they still stand in need of the *second* baptism—the sacrament (*mysterion*)[60] called "redemption," *apolutrôsis* (a term which connotes release from captivity, or manumission from slavery).

They support this conviction, too, exegetically, pointing out sayings of Jesus that, they say, contrast the *baptism of John*, water baptism enacted "for the remission of sins," with what they call the *second* baptism, the *apolutrôsis of Christ*, which conveys the holy spirit. Thus, they say, Jesus himself, having received water baptism from John, nevertheless declares that he has "another baptism with which to be baptized" (Mark 10:38), referring to the spiritual baptism, which conveys *teleiôsis*; and ". . . they say that Paul, too, often has explicitly mentioned 'the *apolutrôsis* which is in Christ Jesus.'"[61]

Irenaeus expresses concern that such Christians, "not content to deceive themselves, seek to deceive others" by luring unwary believers into meeting with them in private, where they challenge them to question the meaning of the faith.[62] Then they proceed to introduce passages from the

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[57] See, for example, P. Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (New York, 1992), 148-166.

[58] Adv. haer. II.42.

[59] Adv. haer. II.27.1-2.

[60] See Adv. haer. II, *Praef.*

[61] Ibid., I.21.2.

[62] Ibid. III.15.2: I appreciate Virginia Burrus' observation (in "Hierarchalization and Genderization") that the text (praeterquam oportet) should be read carefully; compare,

Scriptures, interpreting "what their words *seem* to teach"[63]—offering, apparently, the kinds of exegesis Irenaeus has already enumerated. After the newcomers have engaged in such a process of spiritual inquiry, they may be told that now, having become mature Christians, they are ready for the ritual of *apolutrôsis*. At this point, various teachers offer to initiate people into their own circles, using a wide variety of ritual practices for this purpose, inviting believers to move beyond the "common" ecclesiastical community into their own esoteric circles.

Irenaeus explains that there is no single way to characterize such ritual. Since "their tradition (*paradosis*) concerning *apolutrôsis* is invisible and incomprehensible," its form is not fixed, and "every one of them transmits it in his own way."[64] "Some," Irenaeus says,

> . . . enact a kind of initiation into the mysteries (μυσταγωγίαν ἐπιτελοῦσι) with certain words they pronounce over those being initiated, and claim that what they are celebrating is a spiritual marriage; but others bring the initiates to water, and, baptizing them speak as follows: "in the name of the unknown Father of all being; into Truth, the mother of all things; into the one who descended upon Jesus (the Spirit); into unity, redemption, and communion with the powers."[65]

Irenaeus reports that still others "repeat certain Hebrew words," and he claims to report such invocations along with translations.[66] Next he reports a series of response *formulae* taught to initiates in preparation for some forms of *apolutrôsis* ritual. He describes how, after the liturgical dialogue concludes and the initiate is baptized, the bystanders unanimously pronounce the "peace," and the initiate is anointed with balsam. Yet others, he says, unlike the groups mentioned so far, claim that rebaptizing the ini-

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for example, IV.26.2. et quocunque loco (colligunt): should we translate they assemble "anywhere whatever"? Certainly she is right to point out that Irenaeus does not call himself bishop, nor, as my 1979 writing suggested, does he demand to supervise all meetings. But what he does claim—the leadership authority of the true teacher—is, I suggest, not separable from liturgical and ecclesiastical authority; at least, Irenaeus doesn't seem to think so; see, for example, IV.18-33 (and references from pp. 31-38 of this paper).

[63] Adv. haer. III.15.2.

[64] Ibid., I.21.1.

[65] Ibid., I.21.3.

[66] The two formulae he records here, however, are not in Hebrew, nor does his report of their meaning correspond to his translation. These terms may intend to convey the names of supernatural "powers"—either those from whom *apolutrôsis* is sought, or those who are thought to convey it.

tiate is superfluous, and so enact *apolutrôsis* simply through invocations and anointing. Still others, Irenaeus tells us, reject even these practices, declaring that since "recognition (γνώσις) of the ineffable greatness" is itself "the complete *apolutrôsis*," no physical elements or acts are needed to convey it.[67] Finally, Irenaeus describes yet another form of the rite that combines invocations with anointment and a ritual dialogue, in order to effect *apolutrôsis* from the lower powers, and restoration to those above.[68]

Several texts discovered at Nag Hammadi offer evidence that corroborates many elements in Irenaeus' account, suggesting that he had, indeed, carefully investigated various forms of ritual practiced among Valentinian groups. The *Gospel of Philip*, for example, often refers to a rite (*mysterion*) called *nymphios* (Coptic ⲛⲩⲙⲫⲓⲟⲥ), and so imaged as a spiritual marriage.[69] Yet this author's allusions to *nymphios* remain so impressionistic that scholars variously have suggested identifying it as a separate "gnostic" ritual; as an interpretation of baptism, chrism and eucharist; or (as I tend to think is more likely in the case of the *Gospel of Philip*) as the whole process through which a Christian who is spiritually "mature" receives these sacraments (*mystèria*).[70] As for the invocations Irenaeus wrongly supposes are Hebrew words, I know of no exact parallels among the Nag Hammadi texts; but comparing them with the wide range of *nomina sacra* that occur in invocatory passages in such texts as *The Gospel to the Egyptians* may prove instructive.[71]

Most intriguing, perhaps, are partial parallels to Irenaeus' various accounts of serial response *formulae* taught to initiates in preparation for *apolutrôsis*.[72] According to one of Irenaeus' accounts, the initiate first identifies himself in terms of his spiritual paternity ("I am a son from the preexistent Father . . ."), then tells whence he came ("I derive origin—*genos*—from the preexistent . . .") and where he is going ("I am going to the place where I belong, whence I came"). Such answers seem to respond to a stock set

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[67] Adv. haer. I.21.4.

[68] The Latin text suggests that this latter rite was performed on those who were dying, but the evidence is far from clear; see Adv. haer. I.21.6.

[69] I am grateful to Michael Stone for pointing out the variant in 4 Ezra 7:26.

[70] For discussion, references, and citations, see E. Pagels, "Ritual in the Gospel of Philip," in: J.D. Turner and A. McGuire, *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years* (Leiden, 1995), 280-291; see also the impressive study by J. Turner, "Ritual in Sethianism," delivered at the SBL meeting in November, 2000.

[71] See, for example, J. Sevrin, *Le Dossier Baptismal Séthien: Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (Canada, 1986), 94-110.

[72] Adv. haer. I.21.3 and 6.

of questions—questions that could serve the *archons* of government, as appropriate to a local border patrol as to interrogation at a trial—but which religious groups apparently adopted into various forms of initiation ritual. Clement of Alexandria attests that followers of the teacher Theodotus used a corresponding set of questions in baptism. So, according to Clement, "they say" that the initiate not only receives "the bath, but also the *gnosis of who we were, what we have become, whence we came, whither we hasten*," and comes to understand the process of *apolutrôsis* (πόθεν λυτρούμεθα) as well as the distinction between ordinary birth and baptismal *rebirth* (τί γέννησις, τί ἀναγέννησις).[73] However enacted, Irenaeus says that such Christians "say that it is necessary for those who have received complete understanding (τελείαν γνῶσιν) to come to be reborn (ἀναγεγεννημένοι) into the power which is above all things."[74]

The author of the *Gospel of Philip* concurs: through this *mysterion*, "we are born again . . . through the holy spirit" (Jn 3:5).[75] Because this *Gospel* offers an illuminating example of one teacher's understanding of *apolutrôsis*—one based on exegesis of the *Gospel of John*, among other sources—we briefly sketch a summary of an earlier, detailed discussion.[76] Unlike Irenaeus' account of what the "followers of Ptolemy" teach, however, the author of this gospel neither denigrates "first baptism," nor indicates any knowledge of a "higher" or distinct baptismal ritual.[77] When Philip[78] speaks of bap-

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[73] *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 76.3. Intriguingly, *The Gospel of Thomas* has "the living Jesus" instruct his followers about a similar set of questions they will be asked: first, "Where did you come from?" (ⲛⲧⲁⲧⲉⲛϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ); next, "Who are you?" (ⲛⲧⲱⲧⲛ ⲡⲉ), and finally, "What is the sign of your father in you?" (ⲟⲩ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲙⲁⲉⲓⲛ ⲙⲡⲉⲧⲛⲉⲓⲱⲧ ⲉⲧⲣⲛ ⲧⲏⲩⲧⲛ), and instructs them in the answers they are to give, probably in a baptismal ritual; for discussion of the context, see J.Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," HR 5 (1966), 217-238; for an alternate view, A. de Conick and J. Fossum, "Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the *Gospel of Thomas*," in VC 45 (1991) 123-50; see also E. Pagels, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," JBL 118,3 (1999), 477-9. For similar lists of questions, although not placed in an obviously ritual context, see I Apoc Jas 33-34; Apoc Paul 23; Gos Mary 15.10-17.7.

[74] Adv. haer. I.21.2.

[75] G Phil 69.4-14.

[76] E. Pagels, "Ritual in the Gospel of Philip," in J. Turner, A. McGuire, *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Brill, 1997), 280-291.

[77] See M. Desjardins, "Baptism in Valentinianism," paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Boston, 1987, especially 18-22; see, too, the detailed summary of evidence presented by E. Thomasson at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Nashville, 2000.

[78] In using such a shorthand term to designate the author of this text, we do not,

tism, so far as we can tell, he seems to have in mind the kind of rite to which sources as diverse as the *Didache* and Justin's *Apology* refer. Yet Philip does criticize the way that "some" Christians practice baptism, saying that these may serve to bind people to the cosmic powers, instead of releasing them, because such believers are "in error" concerning *rebirth* and *resurrection*. So, Philip explains, "some say that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit; they are in error."[79] Thus Philip castigates those who believe that Jesus' birth derived its significance from its uniqueness, a miraculous event in which a woman conceived by parthenogenesis. Instead, Philip explains, Christ's *virgin birth* and his *resurrection*, far from being unique events, are actually paradigms for the experience of everyone who undergoes baptism and receives the Holy Spirit. Thus, just as Jesus was born, as we are, from human parents, from Joseph and Mary, so also he was *spiritually* born from the Father in heaven and from "the virgin who descended" to earth, that is, the Holy Spirit. Christ, then, established the paradigm, so that those who follow in his path might come to be born, as he was, "through the Holy Spirit" in baptism (Jn 3:5f.). So, Philip explains, "when we became Christians we came to have both a father and mother," now becoming, like Christ himself, children of the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit.

Philip declares, however, that people he designates as "the apostles and the apostolic ones" err, since they remain oblivious of—or offended by—this *mysterion*. Such people interpret Jesus birth and resurrection as if they happened only to *him* and not to *ourselves* as well. Offering another example, Philip takes up a second issue that Christians dispute—this time, concerning resurrection. Here again, Philip envisions a direct analogy between Christ's experience and that of the initiate. Against those who take resurrection as a unique event in which Christ died and then rose bodily from the dead, Philip invokes Pauline passages to explain that those who receive the spirit in baptism thus also receive "resurrection" and "redemption" (*apolutrôsis*). Then, apparently responding to those who insist that resurrection means "resurrection of the flesh," Philip agrees that of course one must rise "in this flesh," since, he says, in this world "everything exists in it." But, he continues, what does "flesh" mean? To answer this, he quotes approvingly a saying attributed to Jesus in the *Gospel of John* ("Whoever shall not eat my flesh and drink my blood does not have life in him" Jn

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of course, presume that someone named Philip, much less the apostle mentioned in the New Testament gospels, actually served as its author.

[79] G Phil 55.24-25.

6:53) and interprets the verse in the context of eucharistic practice: "His flesh is the *logos*, and his blood is the *holy spirit*. Whoever has received these has food and drink."[80] Thus Philip indicates how his perspective differs from that of Christians such as Irenaeus, who regards Jesus' divine birth and his resurrection as unique, revelatory events that insure salvation for the rest of humankind. Philip, on the contrary, declares that one who receives the Holy Spirit while being initiated through the sacramental process that includes baptism, eucharist, and chrism may become "no longer a Christian, but a Christ (ⲭⲣⲓⲥⲧⲟⲥ, anointed one)."[81]

Challenging such theology, Irenaeus charges that what *apolutrôsis* really means is something very different: namely, that Satan has inspired these so-called "spiritual teachers" to "*deny that baptism is rebirth unto God, and to renounce the whole faith.*"[82] By deprecating what they hold in common with other believers, and by "initiating" people into various subgroups, such Christians may create potentially innumerable schisms throughout Christian groups worldwide, as well as in each congregation. For, Irenaeus continues,

> They call those who belong to the church "common," and "ecclesiastic". . . . and *if anyone gives himself up to them like a little sheep, and follows out their practice and their apolutrôsis*, such a person is so elated that he imagines he . . . has already entered within the "fullness of God" . . . and goes strutting around with a superior expression on his face, with all the pomposity of a cock.[83]

Irenaeus concludes that "no rectification of the church could possibly compensate" for the way that these would-be reformers actually "cut in pieces and destroy the great and glorious body of Christ."[84] According to Irenaeus, for Valentinian Christians, what actually "makes the difference" then, between ordinary believers and spiritual Christians is *apolutrôsis*. But Irenaeus sees the same ritual very differently: it is *apolutrôsis* that "converts" genuine Christians into heretics.

Yet Irenaeus realizes that to vanquish these most insidious of heretics, he has to go much farther than he has in his first book, in which, as he summarizes in the preface to book two,

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[80] G Phil 71,5-10.

[81] G Phil 68,26.

[82] Adv. haer. I.21.1.

[83] Ibid., III.15.2. Harvey suggests that the Greek text read as follows: . . . τὴν τούτων ἀκολουθίαν καὶ τὴν τούτων ἀπολύτρωσιν τετυχηκώς.

[84] Ibid., IV.33.7.

> . . . we have shown that all these heretics, taking their initiative from Simon, introduced impious and irreligious doctrines (*dogmata*) . . . and *we set forth their apolutrôsis (redemptionem), and in what way the initiate those whom they "perfect", as well as their invocations (note on trans: Harvey reconstructs* προσρήσεις*) and their sacraments (mystèria).*

And although, as noted above, Irenaeus adopts whatever available polemical strategies he finds useful, the most effective are those he innovates. How, then, does Irenaeus himself join hermeneutical and ritual practice in order to counter what he regards as such threats to church unity?

As we have seen, Irenaeus' first response was to declare that one must "hold unmoving in his heart the rule of truth which he received through baptism," and to proceed immediately to enumerate what he claimed were universally accepted elements of "the church's faith." Many church historians, following Harnack, have assumed that this "rule of faith" consisted of some kind of creed, or, as Seeberg asserted, of certain catechetical formulae.[85] Yet tactics that may have been developed to weed out Marcion's followers from the churches proved useless against Valentinians. As van den Eynde has shown, Irenaeus recognized that Valentinian Christians could—and did—receive the same kind of baptism and "confess the same faith." How, then, could he persuade believers that their "common" baptism, far from being merely the preliminary step, actually effects, in his words, "rebirth to God," and conveys not just elementary teaching, but, indeed, the "whole faith"?

To accomplish this, Irenaeus sets out to *reformulate* the "canon of truth" and so to reestablish the truth of the faith received in baptism. And although he says that he himself has no need for "that series of proofs (*probationem*) which may be derived from the writings of the Lord (*ex scripturis Dominicis*)" that figure so prominently in Valentinian theology, nevertheless, "lest I be thought to avoid them," he declares that he intends to devote a special book to setting forth "proofs" from these "these divine scriptures"—proofs that, he says, should satisfy "all those who love truth."[86]

As he opens this "special book," volume three of his treatise, Irenaeus intends, first of all, to limit the sources of revelation by outruling recourse to what he calls "innumerable apocryphal and illegitimate writings"[87] that his opponents often invoke, along with their alleged access to "secret

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[85] For references, see note 51 above.

[86] Adv. haer. II.25.3.

[87] Ibid., I.20.1.

revelation" orally transmitted by Paul (or any of the apostles).[88] Then, in order to control which of many Christian writings legitimately convey "the gospel"[89]—that is, the living, oral preaching which the apostles proclaimed in common—Irenaeus takes the bold step of defining the "fourformed gospel" as the whole constellation of truth supported by four "pillars," which are, he explains, the written gospel accounts attributed to *Matthew, Luke, Mark,* and *John.*[90]

But Irenaeus is well aware that taking this step—so crucial to the development of what Christians in later generations would call the "New Testament canon"—would not suffice to curb Valentinian Christians' "heretical" practices of exegesis and *apolutrôsis.* Nothing demonstrates this more clearly than what he set forth as his prime example of "evil" exegesis, the *Commentary* on the *Gospel of John* often attributed to Ptolemy. Did Irenaeus know that Heracleon, another prominent disciple of Valentinus, had written what is, so far as we know, the earliest known *Commentary* on John's gospel,[91] and that other Valentinian Christians, including the authors of such major works as the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Gospel of Truth*, and the *Tripartite Tractate* interpreted *John* as well? Perhaps so, for he says that he has read "some of their *Commentaries.*"[92] Certainly he acknowledges that those who "make copious use" of the *Gospel of John* are precisely those he intends to expose as heretics—Valentinus and his disciples.[93]

Irenaeus may have realized, too, that many of his fellow believers might regard the *Gospel of John* as problematic, even suspect.[94] Perhaps he knew

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[88] Adv. haer. III.3.2f.

[89] Ibid., II.11.9: For an excellent discussion of the use of the term *euangelion* in Adv. haer., see A. Reed, "Εὐαγγέλιον: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses*", *Vig. Chr.* 56 (2002), 11-46.

[90] Ibid. III.11.8. For a fine discussion of Irenaeus' use of the *Gospel of Matthew,* see D.J. Bingham, *Irenaeus' Use of Matthew's Gospel in Adversus Haereses* (Louvain/Peeters, 1998).

[91] See, for example, A. Orbe, *Hacia la primera theologia de la procesion del verbo.* Estudios Valentinianos Volume 1.1 (Rome, 1958); E. Pagels, *The Gospel of John in Gnostic Exegesis* (Fortress, 1973).

[92] Adv. haer. I, *Praef.*

[93] Here again, evidence from Nag Hammadi supports his contention. Such major Valentinian texts as the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and the *Tripartite Tractate*, all draw extensively on the *Gospel of John.* A variety of other Nag Hammadi texts also make use of the *Gospel of John*; Karen King argues, for example, in a fascinating forthcoming monograph, that the *Apocryphon of John* is written to extend and interpret the *Gospel of John.*

[94] Note the discussion of this gospel in Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 185-190.

that this gospel was either not known—or, so far as we know, not acknowledged—by his own teacher, Polycarp of Smyrna, nor by the revered martyr, Ignatius of Antioch, nor, for that matter, by his mentor, Justin Martyr.[95] Irenaeus' contemporary, the Roman Christian Gaius, charged that the *Gospel of John* was actually written by the heretic Cerinthus. Yet introducing the Johannine gospel into circles of 'ecclesiastical' Christians apparently was not an innovation on Irenaeus' part. Some years earlier, another of Justin's students, the Syrian Tatian, had included it with the synoptics and other sources into his synthesis of gospel traditions.[96] Irenaeus himself treats it as part of the tradition he received from his home community in Asia Minor, telling us that "John, the disciple of the Lord," wrote this gospel while he was living in Ephesus, a man revered by many believers, including Polycarp.[97] Irenaeus notes, too, that Christians sympathetic to the controversial "new prophecy" movement apparently drew upon this gospel's promise of the coming "Paraclete."[98]

What, then, impels Irenaeus to join the *Gospel of John* with the much more widely accepted synoptics and to claim it as an indispensable element of what he calls the "fourformed gospel"? And while he admits that *John* was written only after *Matthew, Mark*, and *Luke* (and so has the least claim to antiquity), why does he place it not (as Christians did later) as the *fourth* gospel, but instead as the *first and foremost* pillar of the "the church's gospel"?[99] Irenaeus says that this gospel deserves its exalted position because John—and John alone—proclaims Christ's

> . . . original, powerful, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, 'In the beginning was the *logos*, and the *logos* was with God, and the *logos* was God (Jn 1:1-2).' Also, 'all things were made through him (the *logos*) and without him nothing was made (Jn 1:3).'

Astonishingly, Irenaeus declares that it is the *Gospel of John*—and especially the prologue—that establishes the canon of truth. Irenaeus clearly

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[95] See, for example, the discussion by H. Koester in *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 360-402.

[96] I am grateful to Annette Reed for reminding me that despite the title that later Christians would give to his attempted harmonization of gospel sources (*Diatesseron*), Tatian seems to have used at least one other gospel as well; his was clearly not a "fourformed gospel."

[97] Adv. haer. III.3.4.

[98] Adv. haer. III.11.9.

[99] Note animal symbolism in Adv. haer. III.11.8; cf Campenhausen's discussion, 197-198.

identifies himself with "John, the disciple of the Lord" to whom he attributes this gospel, when he says that John actually wrote his gospel for the same purpose that he himself now writes his own treatise—namely, to expose "heretics," to confound those who propagate "falsely so-called gnosis," and above all "*to establish the canon of truth in the church*."[100] But to make such a case, Irenaeus first has to establish the hermeneutical principle through which one can read this gospel—or any gospel—"without error."

Irenaeus declares that his own chosen strategy is to turn this favorite source of Valentinian Christians against them: "I will prove them wholly in error by means of this very gospel."[101] To do so, he boldly reformulates the "canon of truth" using precisely the terminology and concepts he finds in the *Gospel of John*. To understand "the church's gospel" rightly, Irenaeus declares, one must recognize God, *logos*, and Jesus Christ as ontologically equivalent. Because he manages to find this theological principle in the *Gospel of John*, Irenaeus places this gospel, despite its appropriation by Valentinian Christians, as the first of the four gospels. This "*canon of truth*," amplified in third and fourth century creeds, thus will become—together with the *Gospel of John* from which he forges it—the lens through which believers henceforth are to interpret not only "the gospel" but all of "the scriptures."

For immediately after exposing and denouncing the practice of *apolutrôsis*, Irenaeus borrows the language of Jn 1:1-3 to paraphrase and revise what he calls the "*canon of truth*." Here he invokes Jn 1:3 as his second "proof text", following Psalm 33:6, in order to lend the authority of the Jewish Bible to his reading of the Johannine prologue:

> For we hold the *canon of truth, that is*, that there is one God all powerful, who *created all things through his logos* (cf. Jn 1:3), and fashioned and created from what was not all things that are. Thus says the Scripture: 'By the *logos* of the Lord were the heavens established . . . (Psalm 33:6) and, again, '*all things were made by him, and without him nothing was made*' (Jn 1:3).[102]

Like his Valentinian opponent, then, Irenaeus treats the Johannine passages as "Scripture" holding equal authority with that of the passage from the *Psalms*. But while the Valentinian exegete seems to understand God, *logos*, and Jesus Christ as characterizing descending levels of divine emanation, Irenaeus, on the contrary, insists on their virtual equivalence. As

[100] Adv. haer. III.11.1.
[101] Adv. haer. III.11.6.
[102] Adv. haer. I.22.1.

Irenaeus reads the prologue, then, John radically identifies the *logos* with the "God above all," on the one hand, and, on the other, with "Jesus Christ who dwelt among us." So, Irenaeus explains, John proclaims

> . . . One God all powerful and one Christ Jesus, 'through whom all things came into being' (1:3), he says, 'the *same one* Son of God (1:14); the *same one* only begotten (1:14; 1:18); the *same one* Maker of all things (1:3); the *same one* 'true light enlightening everyone' (1:9); the *same one* Creator of all things (1:3); the *same one* 'coming to his own' (1.11) the *same one* that 'became flesh, and dwelt among us' (1:14).[103]

Irenaeus' bold exegesis, then, interprets *Christ Jesus* as the one 'though whom all things came into being,' and declares that this same Christ Jesus is himself 'maker of all things' and 'Creator of the universe.' As we shall see, Irenaeus will go on to apply this "canon" to his reading of the Jewish Bible, with startling results.

As we noted, Irenaeus insists that this is precisely what distinguishes John from the synoptic evangelists, and elevates his gospel above theirs. For the gospel writings more widely recognized by various Christian groups throughout the world—the *Gospel of Matthew*, as well as the gospels of *Luke* and *Mark*—proclaim Jesus to be Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man. As is well known, such epithets variously characterize Jesus' divinely given status; but they stop far short of identifying him with God, much less *as* God. But Irenaeus takes the *Gospel of John*—and in particular, its prologue—to do precisely that. Specifically, his reformulated "canon of truth" allows him to apply what the prologue says of the *logos* directly to Jesus Christ, so that the two become virtually identical, even interchangeable. So, as noted above, Irenaeus declares that John is speaking of *Jesus Christ* in the prologue's opening verses:

> The *Gospel of John* relates (Jesus Christ's) original, powerful, and glorious generation from the Father, thus declaring, '*In the beginning was the logos, and the logos was with God, and the logos was God*'. . . . also, '*all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made*' (1:1-3).[104]

It is because he believes that John sets forth this "canon of truth" that Irenaeus insists on welding the *Gospel of John* with the synoptics to form that "four-formed gospel." Henceforth Irenaeus repeatedly and emphatically articulates the "canon of truth" in Johannine language:

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[103] Adv. haer. I.9.2-3.

[104] Ibid., III.11.8.

> John, the disciple of the Lord . . . intending through the gospel. . . . to remove error. . . . and confound those teaching *falsely so-called gnosis* (I Tim 1:4) and persuade them that there is only one God, who *made all things through his logos* (Jn 1:3) . . . desiring to put an end to (false) doctrines, and *to establish the canon of truth in the church—that there is one God all powerful, who made all things by his logos* (Jn 1:3), showing at the same time, that *through the logos, through whom God created all things* (Jn 1:3) *he also bestowed salvation* . . . thus began his teaching in the gospel: '*In the beginning was the logos and the logos was with God and the logos was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made. What was made was life in him, and the life was the light of humanity. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*' (Jn 1:1-5).[105]

As we shall see when we turn to the fourth book of his treatise, Irenaeus' insistence on separating Jesus Christ from the rest of humanity and declaring him to be essentially God manifest, opened radically new ways of interpreting the Hebrew Bible. Valentinian theologians, on the contrary, place Jesus Christ together with ourselves on the human side of this equation. Thus they take as the basic premise of their theology in general, and of Johannine exegesis in particular, the premise that the human mind, or consciousness, bears some analogy to the divine. From this premise Valentinian Christians infer that one may, by investigating and exploring one's own experience, discover intimations of truth about God. Thus, Irenaeus says, when Valentinian Christians interpret the *Gospel of John*, they assume that by exploring the function of *nous* or *logos* in human experience, one may discover truths about the divine *nous* or *logos*.

Irenaeus, however, chastises such theologians, accusing them of mistaking for theology what is only their own projection. Every one of them, he charges, only projects what he invents into the Scriptures, "each one seeking to validate his own opinions."[106] When they discuss the nature of *logos*, "they rashly form conjectures about God as if they had discovered something amazing when they claim that *logos* was produced by *nous*."[107] Everyone understands, he says, "that this may logically be affirmed with respect to human experience," but, he insists, human experience offers no accurate analogue to divine being:

> . . . thus it is that heaping together with a kind of plausibility all human emotions, mental exercises, and formation of intentions, and utterances of words,

[105] Loc. cit., III.11.1.
[106] Adv. haer. II.13.10.
[107] Ibid., II.13.8.

> they have lied with no plausibility at all against God. For they ascribe the things that happen to human beings, and whatever they recognize themselves as experiencing, to the divine *logos*.[108]

Were their assumptions true, Irenaeus continues, we would have no need of revelation; indeed, "the coming of the Lord will appear unnecessary and useless, if he did, indeed, come intending to tolerate and preserve each person's ideas concerning God."

Irenaeus intends his own exegesis of John's gospel to demonstrate the opposite: that God—and Jesus Christ, who manifests God on earth—wholly transcends human modes of thought and experience. Against Ptolemy and his disciples, who (like the author of the *Gospel of Philip*), assume a certain kinship (*syngenia*) between Jesus Christ and those who are spiritual, Irenaeus sets forth a detailed exegetical argument to prove that Jesus' transcendence sets him apart from the rest of humanity:

> I have shown from the scriptures that *no one of all the sons of Adam is, in his own right, called 'God' or named 'Lord.'* But that *He is himself, and in his own right . . . beyond all men who ever lived, God, and Lord, and Eternal King, and Onlybegotten, and Incarnate Logos*, is proclaimed by all the prophets, the apostles, and by the Spirit itself, may be seen by all who have attained to even a modicum of truth.[109]

Irenaeus goes on to invoke passages from John's gospel to refute "those who say that (Jesus) was a mere human being, begotten by Joseph." Those who say such things, he warns,

> . . . prove themselves ungrateful to the '*logos* of God, who *became flesh* (Jn 1:14) for them,' and lack the freedom John's Jesus promised when he said, '*If the Son makes you free, you shall be truly free*' (Jn 7:36).[110]

Besides showing that Jesus' "spiritual generation" was wholly unlike ordinary human birth, Irenaeus believes that John's gospel also proves how utterly unlike ourselves he was in death. As Jesus alone was born miraculously from a virgin, so Jesus alone of the whole human race was resurrected corporeally, and taken bodily into heaven. So, he points out from Johannine passages, this gospel tells how Jesus "rose in the substance of flesh, and *pointed out to his disciples the mark of the nails and the wound in his side*" (Jn 20:20-25).[111]

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[108] Ibid., II.13;3; II.13.10.
[109] Ibid., III.19.2.
[110] Ibid., III.19.1.
[111] Adv. haer. V.7.1.

As we noted, besides requiring those who rightly interpret "the church's gospel" to maintain this high Christology, Irenaeus' Johannine "canon of truth" enables him to find the presence of Jesus in the Jewish Bible, wherever allusion is made to God's word or God's manifestation. So, Irenaeus explains, the divine presence that the prophet Ezekiel envisioned surrounded by angels and worshipped in heaven was none other than "the *logos, the Maker of all things* (Jn 1:1-3), 'He who sits enthroned upon the cherubim and contains all things; He who was *made flesh, and dwelt among us*' (Jn 1:13)."[112] As noted above, Irenaeus did not invent such exegesis of the Hebrew Bible; others before him, like the author of the *Letter of Barnabas*, had heard Jesus speak through the mouths of the prophets. Yet Irenaeus' formulation of the "canon of truth" enables him to interpret Biblical passages in ways that are more radical and more systematic than those of his predecessors. Irenaeus' appropriation of Valentinian techniques of Scriptural proofs would become, too, for his orthodox successors, an enormously effective arsenal for theological controversy.

Irenaeus devotes, indeed, the fourth book of his treatise to interpreting the Hebrew Bible, frequently invoking passages from John to demonstrate the identification of *logos* with Jesus Christ. Irenaeus takes Jn 5:26-27, for example, as proof that "the writings of Moses are the words of Christ, as he himself declared to the Jews, '*If you had believed Moses . . . you would have believed me*' (Jn. 5:46-47)."[113] Furthermore, he continues, Jesus' words to "the Jews" in Jn 8:56 ("*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad*") demonstrates that "all who have known God since the beginning . . . have known him through the *logos*." Irenaeus specifies that this means not only since the incarnation, but "throughout all time,"[114] since, Jesus claimed the divine name of the God revealed to the patriarchs when he said, ". . . *before Abraham was, I am*" (Jn 8:58)[115] Both covenants, then, reveal "one and the same God. This, then, is our Lord, the *logos* of God." Irenaeus declares repeatedly that Jesus' words in Jn 14:6-5 ("*I am the way, the truth, and the life*") show that the patriarchs, like Moses and the prophets, knew God through the *logos*.[116] Irenaeus goes on to say that

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[112] Adv. haer. IV.20.9-10.

[113] Adv. haer. IV.2.3.

[114] Loc. cit., IV.7.2; see also IV.7.

[115] Ibid., IV.13.3.

[116] Cf. Abraham, see, for example, Adv. haer. IV.7.3; IV. 7.1; IV.5.3; in regard to Isaiah, IV.2.6.

> . . . . .John appropriately relates what the Lord said to the Jews, "*You search the Scriptures, in which you think you have eternal life . . . and you are not willing to come unto me . . .*" (Jn 5:39-40) and "*For if you had believed Moses, you would also have believed me, because he wrote about me*" (Jn 5:46), saying this, no doubt, because the Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his scriptures; at one time, indeed, speaking with Abraham, when about to eat with him; at another time with Noah, giving him the dimensions (of the ark); at another time, bringing down judgement upon the Sodomites; and again, when he becomes visible, and directs Jacob on his journey (see, for example, Gen. 17:13 and 31.1:1) and speaks with Moses from the bush (Ex 3:4).[117]

Finally, Irenaeus' reformulated "canon of truth" allows him to find the presence of Jesus Christ—as *logos* of God, or as "Lord"—even in Genesis 2, where the creation account refers to "the Lord God." Here again, Johannine passages facilitate his exegesis. Irenaeus takes John 9 as a direct parallel to Genesis 2, so that, he says, just as the creation account relates that "*the Lord* took clay from the earth, and formed man" (Gen 2:7), so the *Gospel of John* tells how "*the Lord* also spat on the ground and made clay, and smeared it upon the eyes" of the blind man. Thus, he concludes, just as "the *logos* of God forms us in the womb (Jer 1:5)," so, according to John 9, "the same *logos* formed the power of sight in him who had been blind from birth." In such exegesis, Jesus Christ becomes the manifest form of God:

> . . . for *the Creator of the world* is truly the *logos* of God; *and this is our Lord*, who in the last times was *made flesh*, existing in this world, and who in an invisible way contains *all things that were made* (Jn 1:3) and is inherent in the whole creation, since the *logos* of God governs and arranges all things; and therefore "*he came to his own*" (Jn 1:11) in a visible manner, and "*was made flesh*" (Jn 1:14), and was hung upon the cross . . .[118]

Irenaeus did not, of course, invent such high Christology, nor did the Johannine evangelist. Such evidence as the "Christ hymn" that Paul quotes in Philippians 2:5-11—to say nothing of Pliny's interrogation of believers who, he reported, "sing a hymn to Christ as to a god"—shows that such formulations were known and accepted in some early Christian groups. Yet Irenaeus' determination to overthrow Valentinian Christianity impels him to draw out clearly and so to emphasize the soteriological and ecclesiastical implications of such Christological hermeneutics.

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[117] Ibid., IV.10.1.
[118] Ibid., V.15.3.

From such exegetical discussion Irenaeus draws practical conclusions about the divisions that, in his view, are troubling Christian churches. Who, he asks, worships God rightly—and who worships God wrongly? Here Johannine passages serve, in the first place, to show that the Jews have been superseded, since, he says, ". . . one can be saved in no other way from the wound of the old serpent . . . except by believing in him who, being '*lifted up*' (Jn 3:14) . . . '*draws all to himself*' (Jn 12:33)."[119] Such passages "prove," for him, that

> . . . the Jews have departed from God, in not receiving his *logos*, but imagining that they could know the Father . . . without the *logos*, being ignorant of *that God who spoke in human form* to Abraham (*Deum nescientes eum qui in figura locutus est humana ad Abraham* . . .) and then to Moses.[120]

Then, having disinherited the Jews, Irenaeus explains that "the Lord" subsequently entrusted the priesthood instead to "his disciples," when he "took bread . . . and gave thanks, and said, 'This is my body,' and the cup likewise . . . he confessed to be his blood," thus teaching them "the oblation of the new covenant, which the church has received from the apostles."[121] What this means, Irenaeus concludes, is that now "this pure oblation *only the church offers—not the Jews . . . nor any of the assemblies (synagogae) of the heretics*."[122]

Irenaeus anticipates the objection he expects from his Christian audience: what would make the eucharist, offered according to Christ's teaching, "impure" when celebrated by Valentinian Christians? Irenaeus argues that their characterization of Jesus is inconsistent with the sacrament they offer:

> . . . how can they be consistent with themselves, when they say that the bread which they eucharize is the body of their Lord, and the cup is his blood, if they do not call him the son of the creator of the world, that is, his *logos* . . .?[123]

Immediately thereafter, he switches the topic to resurrection, charging that the Valentinians' view of resurrection clashes with "the church's" understanding of the eucharist. For, he says, while followers of Valentinus

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[119] Adv. haer. IV.2.3.

[120] Ibid., IV.7.4.

[121] Adv. haer. IV.17.5.

[122] Adv. haer. IV.18.4. Note that Irenaeus apparently uses here the same term as he had in III.15.2 and IV.26.1 (se colliguntur/synagontai) to characterize the "meetings" of Valentinian Christians.

[123] Ibid., IV.18.4.

cite I Cor 15:51 to proclaim resurrection a mystery, they take the previous verse ("flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption") to mean that the physical corpse does not participate in resurrection.[124] But, Irenaeus declares, these "heretics" are wrong: just as the resurrection conjoins two unlike elements, flesh and spirit, so does the eucharist. Therefore he proclaims an ultimatum:

> Either *let them change their understanding* (*gnômè*) or *let them cease offering these things*. But our understanding (*gnômè*) is consistent with the eucharist, and the eucharist confirms our perception . . . proclaiming the community and union (*koinônian kai henôsin*) of flesh and spirit.[125]

Finally Irenaeus again invokes Jn 1:14 to show that participating in the eucharistic offering is essential for salvation ("There is one God who redeemed us by his blood . . . when '*the logos was made flesh*'"), since, he explains, the physical elements of the eucharist, joined with spirit, are what convey the salvation offered through Christ's flesh to ours, so that what is fleshly and human "may attain immortality."[126]

Irenaeus ends book four proclaiming to the unwary that their eternal salvation depends on discriminating which presbyters are genuine, and which are false. He directs believers to obey certain presbyters, and to shun others:

> Therefore it is necessary to obey the presbyters who are in the church—those who have received the succession from the apostles as we have shown, and who have received with the episcopal succession (*episcopatus successione*) the sure charism of truth . . . but to hold in suspicion those who stand apart from the principle succession (*apo tes proergoumenès diadochès*), and gather in any place whatsoever (*et quocunque loco*), (regarding them) either as heretics with evil intentions, or as schismatics, puffed up with themselves, or as hypocrites . . .[127]

Irenaeus recognizes, however, that he is not contending against an anti-clerical movement. On the contrary, he admits that many presbyters whose claims to "priestly office" look virtually identical to any others are, in fact, followers of Valentinus. But just as certain sons of Aaron dared to offer

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[124] Note, from the article cited (note 73) that the author of the *Gospel of Philip* invokes the same verse to make a similar exegetical point.

[125] Adv. haer. IV.18.5.

[126] Adv. haer. IV.20.2: in a rather poetic passage he explains how God's "paternal light" . . . ut in carnem Domini nostri occurrat . . . et a carne eius rutila veniat in nos, et sic homo deveniat in incorruptelam, circumdatus paterno lumine.

[127] Adv. haer. IV.26.1.

incense and "unholy fire" upon the altar of God, and were consumed by God's wrath (Lev 10:1-2), so, he warns, "the heretics . . . who bring strange fire—that is, alien doctrines—to the altar of God shall be burned up by fire from heaven."[128] Since "those who are thought by many to be presbyters" sometimes "serve only themselves," he says that believers must be careful to associate only with presbyters who worship God rightly. What this means, he says, is that they not only teach "sound doctrines" but that, together with the "order of priesthood" (*presbyterii ordine*)[129] they *also* display "sound words and blameless conduct."

Irenaeus concludes book four with a solemn call to judgement—and, apparently, to excommunication.[130] Recalling how God's wrath falls upon the Jews "who became the killers of their Lord,"[131] he declares that one who is genuinely "a spiritual disciple" not only shall judge the followers of Marcion, but also "all the followers of Valentinus," since, although they confess the same things as other believers, they secretly subvert the faith they claim to profess,[132] and so have become, through apostasy, sons of the devil.[133]

As he opens book five, Irenaeus recapitulates the theological stance that he intends his canon of truth to protect. His initial discussion seems to respond to a question. If humanity "belonged by nature to God" and was, indeed, created "in God's image," how can we now have no intrinsic affinity with God (as the Valentinians claim we do)? Irenaeus explains that the original affinity between God and humankind was obliterated when "the apostasy" violently captured the human race and came to wholly tyrannize it. Subsequently, humankind was left wholly incapable of knowing

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[128] Adv haer. IV.26.2.

[129] Ibid., IV.26.2: What Irenaeus means by this phrase is far from clear: what characteristics marked such an "order"? We do not know what this constituted in his time, just as much else about his understanding of the presbyter's role (which Eusebius says that he shared). In attempting to read especially books four and five with care, however, what I see is a seamless discussion involving teaching as well as such ecclesiastical practices as baptism and eucharist—not discrimination between these, as if each engaged different persons or roles.

[130] In using this word, I am not suggesting that we know a formal practice to which this corresponds; rather, Irenaeus' account reads like an attempt to follow Paul's example, and pronounce judgement upon an erring member and "deliver him to Satan" while hoping for his salvation (I Cor 5.3-5).

[131] Adv. haer. IV.28.3.

[132] Adv. haer. IV.33.3.

[133] Adv. haer. IV.41.1.

God, apart from revelation: "in no other way could we have learned the things of God, unless . . . *the logos had become flesh* (Jn 1:14)."[134] Only God himself, incarnate in human flesh, could redeem the human race "through his blood." Consequently, only those who partake of his body and blood in the eucharist thereby are restored to the "union and communion of God and humankind."[135] Finally he again contrasts the heretics, who take "many deviant paths" with those "who belong to the church . . . who have received the sure tradition from the apostles." Such believers share "one and the same faith," observe "the same precepts," and "protect the same form of ecclesiastical constitution . . . in which one and the same path of salvation is demonstrated throughout the world."[136] Vividly evoking scenes from the book of Daniel and the Johannine *Apocalypse*, he leaves the reader with visions of final judgment, as the devil, his antichrist, and all his apostate "powers," along with their human offspring, are thrown into eternal fire, while the heavenly Jerusalem descends to welcome "the presbyters, the disciples of the apostles," along with the faithful.[137] For Irenaeus, then, making a difference between true Christians and those he calls "the Valentinians"—and choosing the path of "orthodox" faith and practice—is what ultimately makes the difference between heaven and hell.

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[134] Adv. haer. V.1.1.
[135] Adv. haer. V.2.1-2.
[136] Adv. haer. V.20.1.
[137] Adv. haer. V.21-34.